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WASHINGTON MONUMENT.

MEMORIAL

OF THE

COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL MONUMENT ASSOCIATION,

RELATIVE TO

The completion of the Washington Monument.

APRIL 29, 1880.—Referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The undersigned respectfully represent that, at a meeting of the Washington Monument Association held in this city on the 1st of April, they were appointed a committee "to take charge of the interests of the monument before Congress"; that, in accordance with this appointment, they have called upon Colonel Casey, the engineer in charge of the work, for a condensed statement of the precise existing condition of the monument, and of the plans and purposes of the commissioners to whom the supervision of itsconstruction has been consigned; and that they now respectfully ask leave to submit the statement of Colonel Casey to the consideration of Congress, and to express their earnest hope that it may lead to such definitive action as will insure the early completion of this long deferred tribute to the Father of his Country.

Thirty-two years have now nearly expired since the corner stone of this monument was laid, with solemn rites and imposing ceremonies, in presence of the President of the United States, and of the Senators and Representatives of that period. The original certificates given to the thousands of early subscribers to the work, bore the names of John Quincy Adams, James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, George M. Dallas, Albert Gallatin, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster, all "earnestly recommending the project to the favor of their fellow countrymen." The names of Chief Justice Marshall and of James Madison had been previously associated with the enterprise, as the successive presidents of our association. Under the influence and encouragement of these great names, the work proceeded auspiciously for seven or eight years. Costly stones were presented by not a few towns and cities and States, and by associations of every sort throughout the country, to take their place in the interior of the structure, where their inscriptions could be read by all who should ascend the steps in-

tended to lead to its summit. Many similar stones were soon welcomed as offerings from foreign lands. Meantime nearly $250,000, in round numbers, were contributed by the people of the United States, of all ages, and from all quarters of the Union, and the shaft of the monument was built up to a height of more than a hundred and fifty feet before the work was suspended for want of further contributions in 1856. The financial embarrassments from which the business and people of the country were suffering about that time, and the great national convulsions which soon followed, furnish an ample explanation of the cessation of all efforts to advance this work for many years. But with the happy return of domestic peace and prosperity, and the renewed assurance of the perpetuity of our Federal Union, the desire became general here and in all parts of our land, that the monument to Washington, should no longer remain unfinished, and the measures which have since been adopted to this end are familiar to Congress and the country. They are succinctly but sufficiently set forth in the statement of Colonel Casey.

That statement warrants the assertion that all reasonable, or even unreasonable, doubts as to the security of the foundation have now been removed; and there is abundant testimony from the highest scientific sources, that by a most ingenious and skillful process, which has been carried on by the authority of Congress, the base of the monument has been rendered capable of sustaining as great a weight as it has ever been proposed to place upon it, and that the shaft, when carried up to its contemplated height, will be able to withstand the force of a wind of double the velocity of any which could reasonably be the subject of calculation or conjecture.

The undersigned are not unmindful that strong efforts have been made of late to throw discredit on the design of the monument, and that various plans have been presented for changing the character of the structure. Nor has the Association, which the undersigned have the honor to represent, ever been unwilling that such modifications of the design should be made as should be found necessary for the absolute security of the work. With this view, they gave formal expression a year ago to their acquiescence in the general plans of the accomplished American artist, Mr. Story, who had kindly given his attention to the subject; but now that the strengthening of the foundation has been successfully and triumphantly accomplished by a signal application of skill and science, they cannot forbear from making a respectful but urgent appeal to Congress to give their final sanction to the prosecution and completion of the work without more delay, according to the plans recommended by the commissioners appointed by Congress, with the President of the United States at their head, and by the engineer under their direction. Any other course, they are convinced, would be likely to postpone the completion of the monument for another generation, to involve the whole subject in continued perplexity, and to necessitate vastly larger appropriations in the end than have now been asked for.

The main element of the original design of this monument was an obelisk. The pantheon proposed for encircling its base was long ago abandoned. The simple obelisk is all that is contemplated.

It has been objected in some quarters that the ancient obelisks were all monoliths—massive single stones, cut whole from the quarry; but our country has been proud to give examples of both political and material structures which owe their strength to union; and this monument to Washington will not be the less significant or stately from embodying the idea of our national motto, "*E pluribus unum.*"

Source unknown

When the well-known monument on Bunker Hill was originally projected, more than half a century ago, an obelisk of this composite character, constructed of separate blocks of hewn granite, was agreed upon by the most distinguished artists and architects of that day. The late eminent sculptor, Horatio Greenough, furnished the design, and it was approved by Gilbert Stuart, Washington Allston, and Loammi Baldwin. Daniel Webster, Joseph Story, and Edward Everett united at the time in pronouncing it the most effective design for a monument of that momentous battle. It was finished accordingly, and has stood, and still stands, proudly on that consecrated spot; and few persons, if any, are found at this day to wish that it had assumed any other form. And this monument to Washington when completed according to the present plans, of much more than twice the height of the Bunker Hill obelisk, and of pure white marble, will silence all criticism and cavil.

Doubtless, something more original and more ornate might have been conceived at the outset, or might now be designed; but there are abundant fields for the exhibition of advanced art in other parts of the country, if not here. This monument and its design, will date back to the time of its inception, and will make no pretensions to illustrate the arts of 1880. It was not undertaken to illustrate the fine arts of any period, but to commemorate the foremost man of all the ages. Indeed, it will date back in its form and its proportions to a remote antiquity. It is a most interesting fact communicated to us in the letters, hereto appended, of our accomplished American minister at Rome, the Hon. George P. Marsh, as the result of his own researches, that the proportions of this monument as now designed, are precisely those of all the best known ancient obelisks. The height of those monuments is ascertained by him to have been uniformly and almost precisely ten times the dimension of the base: and this proportion has now been decided on for our own monument to Washington, the measurement of the base being fifty-five feet, and the projected elevation five hundred and fifty feet.

But without dwelling further on the subject of the design, it seems to the undersigned sufficient respectfully to suggest, that the question before Congress at this moment is, not whether the original plans might not have been improved to advantage, but whether this long-delayed work shall be finished within any reasonable period and at any estimable cost, or be left still longer as a subject for competition among designers and contractors,—an eye-sore at the capital, a vexation to Congress, and a reproach to the country. By the adoption of the recommendations of the commissioners and the engineer, the work may be completed within the next four years. The machinery for the elevation of the stones has been most ingeniously contrived, and is now almost in readiness for action; and by the appropriation at once of the sum now asked for, the marble for the whole structure may be contracted for and secured from a single quarry, and the danger avoided of having marble of different shades and qualities, which might seriously impair the effect of the obelisk. The monument would thus be completed with an assurance of that harmony of color which is essential to its beauty.

The undersigned have a deep feeling that the time has arrived for finishing this great work according to the general design of those by whom it was undertaken, and they have the fullest confidence that such a course will commend itself to the approbation of the whole country. While the structure would make no appeal to a close and critical inspection as a mere work of art, it would give a crowning finish to the grand public buildings of the capital, would add a unique feature to the surrounding landscape, and would attract the admiring gaze of the most

distant observers in the wide range over which it would be visible. It would be eminently a monument for the appreciation of the many, if not of the few, and would thus verify the designation, originally given to it, of "The People's Monument to their most illustrious Benefactor."

A simple, sublime shaft, on a commanding bank of the Potomac and within view of Mount Vernon, resting on the very spot selected by Washington himself for a monument of the American Revolution, and rising nearer to the skies than any known monument on earth, will be no unworthy memorial, or inappropriate emblem, of his own exalted character and pre-eminent services. It will certainly need no elaborate sculpture or ornamentation to impress upon all who shall behold it, from generation to generation, a becoming sense of the grandeur of his career and of the undying veneration and gratitude of the people of the United States.

With these views, and in behalf of the National Monument Association, the undersigned respectfully and earnestly pray that the appropriation asked for by the commissioners may now be made, that this long-delayed tribute to the Father of his Country may at length be taken out of the field of doubt and controversy, and that the imperative word may be pronounced by Congress, "Let it be finished."

ROBERT C. WINTHROP,
J. M. TONER,
JAMES G. BERRET,
HORATIO KING,
JNO. B. BLAKE,
DANL. B. CLARKE,
Committee of the National Monument Association.

At a special meeting of the Washington National Monument Society, on the 26th of April, 1880, Hon. W. W. Corcoran in the chair, the foregoing memorial was unanimously approved, and ordered to be presented to both branches of Congress in behalf of the Association.

Attest: F. L. HARVEY, JR., *Clerk.*

APPENDIX.

ENGINEER OFFICE WASHINGTON MONUMENT,
CORNER SEVENTEENTH AND F STREETS,
Washington, D. C., April 19, 1880.

HON. ROBERT C. WINTHROP,
Chairman of Committee of Washington Monument Society:

DEAR SIR: Agreeably to your request that a succinct account of the project for the completion and the condition of the work upon the Washington National Monument should be given your committee, I have the honor, with the sanction of the joint commission for the completion of the monument, to report as follows:

ADMINISTRATION.

Under the authority of the act of Congress of August 2, 1876, and joint resolutions of June 14, 1878, and June 27, 1879, the monument is being constructed under the direction and supervision of a joint commission, consisting of the President of the United States, the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, the Architect of the Capitol, the Chief of Engineers of the United States Army, and the first vice president of the Washington National Monument Society.

PROJECT.

The project or design of the work is an obelisk 550 feet in height, faced with white marble and backed with dressed granite rock. Of this structure 156 feet is already finished.

The base of the monument is 55 feet square, the top will be 34 feet 6 inches square, and it will be crowned with a pyramidion, or roof, 50 feet in height.

The proportions of the parts of this obelisk are in exact accordance with the classic proportions of parts of this style of architecture, as determined after careful research by the Hon. George P. Marsh, American minister at Rome.

The shaft, as proportioned, both in dimensions and weight, will be entirely stable as against winds that could exert a pressure of one hundred pounds or more per square foot upon any face of the structure.

The project includes the preparation of the foundation so as to enable it to carry this structure. This preparation, or strengthening, consists in making the existing foundation wider and deeper, in order to distribute the weight over a greater area, and in bringing upon each square foot of the earth pressed no greater weight than it is known to be able to sustain.

CONDITION OF THE WORK.

1. *Preparation of foundation.*—This consisted in placing a mass of Portland cement concrete beneath the existing foundation, extending downwards 13½ feet; underneath and within the outer edge of the old foundation 18 feet; and without this edge 23 feet; then, of taking out the old foundation from beneath the shaft, for a sufficient distance back to obtain a good bearing upon the new masonry which is built out upon the slab first mentioned.

This work is so far advanced that it will be entirely completed by the 15th of June.

2. *Preparation for the shaft.*—The other operations have consisted in the erection of the interior frame-work for the staircases and elevator within the shaft, which frame-work will be used in the construction of the masonry; the collection of granite and marble for continning the shaft; and the preparation of the machinery for raising the stones to the top of the shaft, and setting them in place on the walls.

APPROPRIATIONS.

The only appropriation for this work as yet made by Congress is two hundred thousand dollars, contained in the act of August 2, 1876, which sum will be exhausted by the end of August, 1880.

The estimate for completing this work is $677,000, and the time required will be four working seasons.

Very respectfully, your ob't servant,

THOS. LINCOLN CASEY,
Lieutenant-Colonel Engineers, U. S. A., Engineer in charge.

UNITED STATES SENATE CHAMBER,
Washington, D. C., March 31, 1879.

DEAR SIR: I inclose, as possibly of interest, extracts from a letter I have just received from Hon. George P. Marsh, our minister at Rome.

These extracts refer to the Washington Monument question. Mr. Marsh is among the most learned and accomplished of those in any country who have given the subject of architecture and monumental art attention.

Very truly yours,

GEO. F. EDMUNDS.

Gen. T. L. CASEY,
Corps of Engineers.

[Extracts.]

ROME, *February* 9, 1879.

DEAR MR. EDMUNDS: By a letter from the sculptor Mead to Mrs. Marsh, I understand that the main feature of the Washington Monument is to be an obelisk of great height, surmounted by a colossal statue, and with *bas-reliefs* at a suitable height from

the base. I believe I have not only seen but sketched every existing genuine—that is, Egyptian—obelisk, for no other can fairly be said to be genuine. The obelisk is not an arbitrary structure which every one is free to erect with such form and proportions as suit his taste and convenience, but its objects, form, and proportions were fixed by the usage of thousands of years; they satisfy every cultivated eye, and I hold it an esthetical crime to depart from them.

In its objects the obelisk is monumental, its inscriptions having reference to and indicating what or whom it commemorates. I do not think *bas-reliefs* too great a departure from the primitive character of the inscriptions, because we can come no nearer an alphabet answering the purpose.

The most important point is the form and proportions of the structure, as to which the modern builder of obelisks transgresses greatly. The Egyptian obelisks do not, indeed, all conform with mathematical exactness to their own normal proportions, but (probably from defects in the stone) frequently vary somewhat from them. When truly fashioned, however, they are more pleasing to the eye than when deviating from the regular shape.

The obelisk consists: First, of a naked shaft, with or without inscription, the height of which is ten times the width of its base, so that if the base of the shaft is fifty feet square, then the height of the shaft must be five hundred feet. For optical reasons (which cannot be considered in the Washington Monument, it being too late) the faces of the shaft are slightly convex.

The dimensions of the shaft are reduced as it rises, and in this point the ancient obelisks vary more than any other, the top of the shaft varying from two-thirds to three-quarters of the linear measurement of the base. Hence, if the base of the shaft (I do not mean of the pedestal or plinth, if there is one) is fifty feet square, its summit may be anywhere between thirty-three and one-third and thirty-seven and one-half feet square. The obelisks much reduced are the most graceful, but in this case the great height will of itself reduce the apparent measurement, so that perhaps thirty-five would not be too much. But the shaft has already gone up so far as to have settled those questions of form irrevocably. Second, of a pyramidion or apex, the form and proportions of which are constant. The base of the pyramidion is of exactly the same dimensions as the summit of the shaft, and unites with it directly without any break (except, of course, one angle), and with no ledge, molding, or other disfigurement. The height of the pyramidion is equal to the length of a side of the base of the shaft, and therefore greater than the side of its own base.

There are cases where the hieroglyphics run up one or more faces of the pyramidion, but in general these faces are perfectly plain.

The Egyptians often covered the whole pyramidion with a closely fitted gilt bronze cap, the effect of which must have been magnificent.

It has been said that it was sometimes surmounted by a gilt star, but I doubt this, for the casing of the pyramidion would of itself have much the same effect.

The notion of spitting a statue on the sharp point of the pyramidion is supremely absurd. Not less so is the substitution of a low hipped roof for an acute pyramidion, or the making of a window in the face of the pyramidion or of the shaft, both which atrocities were committed in the Bunker Hill Monument. There will no doubt be people who will be foolish enough to insist on a peep-hole somewhere; and if they must be gratified the window should be of the exact form and size of one of the stones, and provided with a close-fitting shutter colored exactly like the stone, so that when shut it would be nearly or quite imperceptible from below.

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Yours, truly,

GEO. P. MARSH.

Hon. GEO. F. EDMUNDS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *May* 12, 1879.

MY DEAR GENERAL: I have received from Mr. Marsh a letter on the subject of the monument, a copy of which I herewith forward to you, thinking it may interest you.

Yours, truly,

GEORGE F. EDMUNDS.

Gen. T. L. CASEY,
Corps of Engineers, Washington, D. C.

ROME, *April* 25, 1879.

DEAR MR. EDMUNDS: I am much obliged to you for yours of April 8, with General Casey's letter and the two Congressional documents. I am agreeable surprised to learn from General Casey's interesting letter that the normal proportions have been so nearly

observed hitherto in the construction of the obelisk. In fact, it being difficult to obtain such vast masses of granite rock, even in the quarries of Syene, entirely free from flaws, the Egyptians were very often obliged to depart more or less from the proportions most satisfactory to the eye, and the Washington obelisk conforms so nearly to those proportions, except in two points, that it is hardly subject to criticism. These points are, the batter, which is more rapid than in any obelisk known to me, and the pyramidion. Perhaps the designer adopted the proportions from considerations of stability, as a summit considerably less than the base would give greater security, and when the dimensions are all so great, differences of proportion are less appreciable.

As to the form and proportion of the pyramidion, the existing obelisks are more uniform than in the measurements of the shaft, and I think that, not merely on the ground of precedent but on that of taste, it would be by all means advisable to give to the pyramidion of the Washington obelisk a height of not less than fifty feet. In any case, if the height of the pyramidion is not greater than the side of its base, the summit will have a truncated shape quite out of harmony with the *soaring* character of the structure.

I infer from General Casey's drawings, accompanying Mr. Corcoran's letter, that the plan of a sort of temple-like excrescence from the base—a highly objectionable feature—is abandoned. It is curious that we do not know precisely what the Egyptian form of the base was. Some authorities state it was a die of larger dimensions than the shaft, and with sides battering at the same rate as the shaft, but I do not find satisfactory evidence that this was by any means universal, though it would certainly be an appropriate and harmonious form. Of course any desirable base can be constructed around the shaft. There are obelisks the surface of which indicates that they were stuccoed, and this suggests that if the shaft of the Washington obelisk shall from time or difference of material, be found parti-colored, surface uniformity of tone may be obtained by the same process.

We have no knowledge of any Egyptian obelisk much exceeding one hundred feet in height, though some ancient writers speak of such monuments of considerably greater dimensions. The extreme difficulty of obtaining monoliths exceeding one hundred feet renders it probable that the measurements of the authorities referred to were mere vague estimates rather than ascertained dimensions.

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Yours, truly,

GEO. P. MARSH.

BROOKLINE, MASS., *August* 1, 1878.

MY DEAR SIR: Your favor of the 20th ultimo reached me yesterday. I thank you for sending me the copy of Mr. Story's letter, which I have read with great interest. I am only a second vice-president of the Monument Association, and am not included in the commission for completing the work. I had no part or lot in the original design of the monument. John Quincy Adams had been relied upon to deliver the oration at the laying of the corner-stone. On his death, in 1848, I was called on, as Speaker of the House, to take his place, and I have occasionally, since then, been instrumental in raising funds for the prosecution of the structure. As an original question, I might have desired a different design; and I had no small part in inducing the building committee, many years ago, to omit the pantheon at the base, and to confine the design to a simple obelisk. After that was arranged, and when the monument had reached so considerable a height, I was very averse to changing the plan. A whole generation of men, women, and children had contributed, in larger or smaller sums, to this particular monument; and States, cities, and foreign nations had sent stones for its completion.

To tear it all down, with a view to improve the design, was abhorrent to me. Story called to see me when he was in Boston, and I told him that, so far as I was concerned, my first wish was to finish the monument as a simple obelisk; but that, if a change was unavoidable, owing to any insecurity of the foundations, his idea of turning it into an ornamental Lombard tower was the best plan I had seen suggested. His letter increases my appreciation of his design, though I am afraid that it would involve an amount of money and time which would postpone the completion for another generation. As it is, I understand the whole question to be settled, and that the commissioners are now going on to strengthen the foundations and carry up the obelisk to four hundred and eighty-five feet. I heartily hope that this is so, and that on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birthday of Washington, in 1882, less than four years hence, we may see and celebrate the accomplishment of this long-deferred work. If I live to that day, I will come on and hear you deliver the oration.

I am aware that what is called "advanced art" looks with scorn on anything so simple and bald as an obelisk, more especially when it is made up of a thousand pieces, instead of being a monolith shaft. Yet the Bunker Hill Monument, of which the design was furnished by one of our earliest and best artists, Horatio Greenough, is one of

these composite obelisks, and Webster was proud to apostrophize it as "the true orator of the day," when he was pronouncing his own incomparable oration.

I recall other obelisks, at home and abroad, which tell their story most impressively; and when I look around to see what "advanced art" has done for us and done for itself in the myriad soldiers' monuments which have been recently erected, I fall back on the simple shaft as at least not inferior to any one of them in effect, and as free from anything tinsel or tawdry.

A grand arch, which I believe you once proposed, would be a noble monument of our Union, and might well be the subject of independent consideration in season for the centennial of the organization of the government in 1889. I have repeatedly urged such an arch as commemorative of our Constitutional Union, in Boston. But it would have still greater propriety in Washington. I cannot help hoping, however, that it will be erected with new stones, and without any disturbance of the Washington obelisk.

Pardon me for so long a letter and for so frank an expression of my views.

I have heard nothing on the subject of late from any of the commissioners or of the association, but have taken it for granted that the whole matter was decided.

If, however, it is to be reopened, I shall be very glad to see Mr. Story's designs, and to consult with you agreeably to your friendly invitation.

Believe me, dear Mr. Morrill, respectfully and truly,

ROBERT C. WINTHROP.

Hon. JUSTIN S. MORRILL,
United States Senator.

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